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1966

ROMANES  
EDUCATION

Letter

Kent

September 22nd., 1966

Dear Ronald,

Well we've arrived in England, as planned, and are preparing for action.

Excuse my delay for not answering your great letter earlier. We've discussed the vocabulary and notes on Romanes with Jack Clarke, Omey, Angelina Smith and others in Dublin and will be making use of them as time goes on - for the children's word books etc..

Incidentally, there are some wonderful educational opportunities here with so many children going to school from the camping sites that have been provided. If only we had the resources to produce some simple books for the children's use. It takes me two hours to make a book by hand and I can't supply 1,000 children this way ! We have to have a Press.

Vanko wrote about two days ago to say that the big meeting in France has been postponed for six months. The reason is that Juan Fernandez, secretary of the Gypsy Association (now closely linked with Vanko's GMG, which is going under another name) is negotiating with the French Government for a large grant for social work. There is a good chance of them getting money that was previously ear-marked for Algerian refugees, I understand. Recently, they have held a number of protest meetings calling for better condition for the Manouches and the Government would be annoyed if they now capped this with an international effort. To me, judging by experience in Ireland, it sounds as if the Government may be keeping them quiet for their own reasons, but still we have to wait and see.

Anyway, we have had to cancel all our arrangements for sending delegates from Ireland and the South of England. The other night I got the Sevenoaks Committee for Gypsy Re-Settlement, which includes Jasper Smith and others, to agree to sponsor one or two delegates. They will now do this next spring.

Meanwhile, they are going ahead in France with the purchase of a large chateau 150 km from Paris. This is to be used as the headquarters of the international committee. In the grounds there is to be a small chrome metal work factory and the park will be used for big gatherings. They have already assembled there and the police used a spotter plane to keep watch on activities.

Vanni and I are going over to Paris for three days just to attend the baptism of Vanko's baby son, Manuel, of whom we are honourary parents. We'll be able to go and see the chateau.

Things are quiet in Kent at the moment but we expect the struggle for sites to start again as soon as the hop season ends next month and people start looking for winter quarters. They are talking of taking over Hosey Common again and we've spotted a promising piece of disused railway track. We're camped on Lord Stanhope's land at the moment - he's one of the travellers' arch-enemies around here, but he hasn't noticed us yet. I'm even cutting wood from his trees for winter fuel.

In the next couple of weeks, we'll be moving up into London, leaving the trailer here as a Kent headquarters. There is a chance of us getting the job as caretakers of a large mansion belonging to the British Council of Churches. It has five bathrooms! We've never had a bathroom for the past five years. Nothing is done at the place. The Council left it in a will four years ago and don't know what to do with it. We hope to have meetings in the winter there while we campaign to unite all the travelling people in the London region.

Also, I've been offered the possibility of a job as assistant secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties. I shall be doing work for them anyway. This will strengthen our position regarding the campaign. The NCCL has already helped to win some important court cases for us, including that at Bromley when twenty families were prosecuted .. "that being Gypsies, they camped at the road side .." which was won.

This brings me on to say that there are several important news stories awaiting publication once you start "O Glas Romano". I will write up the court case as it is a landmark. Also, we should have a report on Derby Smith's funeral which I attended at Lingfield Church the other day. About a hundred of the Smiths were there. I promised Minty Smith that a line would go into "La Voix".

What progress have you been able to make on the paper? I'm getting letters from travellers in all parts of Ireland and can keep up a supply of copy covering the news here. We'll also distribute as many copies as you can send us, say 100 or 200 hundred. Perhaps you'll be able to start as a quarterly. "La Voix", as I expect you know, has not appeared regularly for months though there was a special Belgium edition a few weeks ago.

We are going to put on a film show of some slides made at Cherry Orchard and at the Romany Trust site in Hertfordshire (to show the difference - what can be done) so that we can start a discussion at the Edenbridge site where Minty and Jasper live. The site is very bad and we want to arouse strong indignation among our own people so that either they do something or they get the council to make improvements. There is a possibility of prosecuting the council for neglecting the site. Could we have a lend of a copy of the film you made, at a later date? What is it? How much would it cost to hire, coming from Canada? We could show it at other sites too.